

Cole, Timothy

Drawer 19a

Artist-C

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Artists of Abraham Lincoln portraits

Timothy Cole

Excerpts from newspapers and other
sources

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Portrait d'Abraham Lincoln.
Gravure de T. Cole, d'après le dessin de Wyatt Eaton. (Tiré du *Scribner's Monthly*.)

Ferris Lane Peekskill N.Y.
Feb 14th 1922

Dear Mr Grabhorn

I thank you very much for
your kindness in sending me the Lincoln
This cut recalls to mind when I cut it,
there was only three days allowed me
and I worked night and day stopping
only for hasty meals and drinking Coffee
during nights and on the last night towards
5. or 6 o'clock in the morning I laid down on
the bare floor and slept for just half
an hour. I got it done on time finishing
it on the ferry boat going to N. Y. and
adding final touches at the printer's

Very gratefully yours

Nimothy Coe

Famous Wood Engraver



Pirie McDonald
Timothy Cole

Timothy Cole, Famous Wood Engraver, Dies

Artist, 79, Noted for Reproduction of Great Paintings,
Passes at Poughkeepsie

Was Friend of Whistler

Pictures in 'Century Magazine' 29 Years Won Fame

Special to the Herald Tribune

POUGHKEEPSIE, N. Y., May 17.—Timothy Cole, long regarded by many as the foremost American master of wood engraving, died here today in his home in Ferris Lane. He was seventy-nine years old and had been ill for a long time.

A generation ago nearly every one knew of Mr. Cole and his work; there was general satisfaction when, in 1913, he was elevated to the American Academy of Arts and Letters, there to take position with the painters, John La Farge, Abbott H. Thayer and Elihu Vedder and among his kindred fellows, the sculptors, with Augustus Saint Gaudens and Daniel Chester French.

Won Fame in "Century Magazine"

Wood engravings, which took weeks to produce and required careful printing, went out of popular fashion when magazines and books became objects for mass production. Mr. Cole's most noted work was done before the era of photo-engraving. The whole nation admired his engravings in the old "Century Magazine," on whose pages, for twenty-nine years, appeared his reproductions of great paintings. He traveled through Europe from gallery to gallery, working from the masters and wherever he went he was greeted as the great engraver from America.

He was a small man, with a wrinkled, smooth-shaved face and had close-cropped gray hair that stood straight up all over his head. His large eyes were magnified by spectacles, so that he had always an air of humorous surprise.

Sixteen years ago Joyce Kilmer came to Poughkeepsie to see Mr. Cole. "The foremost living master of the art of wood engraving," he wrote, "might be expected to be found working in some tapestried studio to which a vast skylight admitted the sun." However, Mr. Kilmer soon decided "Timothy Cole's little workroom seemed to me, after I had talked to its distinguished occupant, the ideal place for the exercise of his delicate craft." There was a good north light, Mr. Cole told him, and it was in the back of the house, so there was no noise and no dust from the street. And then Mr. Cole began telling of artists.

Fogs Took Whistler to London

"Do you know why Whistler lived in London?" he asked. "It was because of the fogs. Really, it was. He loved the soft, rich gray mist that often covers London; he would not live where he could not see it. You know how he loved grays, how he used them in his paintings over and over again. He loved the soft, rich gray mist that hung about the houses and bridges of London." Then he talked of Joseph Pennell, of Babcock and Sargent. He said that among his own engravings his favorite was of Carriere's "La Maternite."

In his early life in New York, Mr. Cole delivered newspapers in the shanty district along Fifth Avenue between Forty-third and Forty-eighth Streets. The struggles through which he passed brought into his character a sympathy for those in trouble and a willingness to lend a hand to the younger man, which he never lost. Some of the famed artists of the present can attest to that.

During the Spanish-American War, Timothy Cole was working in the Spanish galleries, and finding the Spanish people friendly he continued his work. Spain was a fine place, he said, and the Spaniards were very kind to the Americans. The Spaniards held no hatred for the Americans, and many of them did not even realize the importance of the war then going on.

It was while in Spain that Cole met Sorolla, who alone of those with whom the engraver came into contact felt keenly the war between the two countries. Sorolla swore then that he never would come to America, but he later did, enjoyed much success and seemed a little apologetic to Mr. Cole for his hot words when he met him again here. In Italy, Mr. Cole found Dr. Robert Underwood Johnson, a friend he had made when he lived in Chicago.

In 1883 Dr. Johnson, then associate editor of "The Century Magazine," had urged the assignment of Mr. Cole to make engravings from the old masters in the galleries of Europe. It was expected this work would require a year and a half; it occupied Mr. Cole's time for twenty-nine years, until 1911, when Dr. Johnson, as editor of the magazine, recalled him to make engravings from the old masters in the American galleries.

Whistler His Best Friend

Whistler, in London, Mr. Cole used to say, was "his fine, gentle, lonely and most reliable friend." Whistler promised Mr. Cole one time to try to cut two blocks for him. Mr. Cole prepared two finely polished pieces, but Whistler found that his lead pencil would not catch on so highly polished a surface, so he turned the wood over and made his drawings on the wrong or rough side so that they were useless for engraving. In London, too, Mr. Cole knew Henry James and often spoke of his diffident manner and his hesitating speech.

When he first visited the Louvre, Mr. Cole said, he thought he never should be able to do any work. The light from the top shone into his lap and on his tools and blinded him. At last, however, by means of refraction and a magnifying glass, he focused the light properly. He did a notable engraving of the Mona Lisa.


Mr. Cole, in his later years, thought nothing of an hour's walk to the station, and when he went to visit his printers in Mount Vernon he often rose at 3:30 o'clock in the morning, walked to the station, went into New York, and then out to Mount Vernon.

Timothy Cole was born in London, but at the age of four, he went to Chicago. There he became a machinist, but the whole trend of his life was changed by the great fire of 1871. His master was burned out and so Timothy, then a lad of twenty, came to New York to look for work.

Tells of Early Struggles

"When I first came to New York," he said afterward, "I went to work for 'Heath and Home.' After a while I asked the art editor to raise my pay and he fired me. So I made engravings and sold them. I couldn't draw but I hired an artist to make the drawings on the wood for me. I sold one to 'The Christian Weekly.' Then I sold another. I wanted to do portraits and C. J. Whinnny, of that magazine, gave me several of them to do.

"And after I'd worked and worked, engraving portraits for him, he gave me the biggest commission I had yet received—to engrave on a great block a portrait of himself. It was a big, pompous thing, that portrait, and I worked hard on it. And, of course, I couldn't ask any money for it."



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There was an important magazine at that time called "The Aldine Press." After a time Timothy Cole got work on it, as did Frederick Juengling.

They were the men who refined and elaborated wood engraving to a perfection unthought of by the earlier masters, giving their work delicate

tones, rich blacks, and expressive lines that were the despair of the English wood engravers.

Once in London a critic asked him, "Mostly, Mr. Cole, have you not been your own master in the art of engraving?"

"Well," he answered, "I just endeavored to learn all I could from any quarter. An engraver, like an artist, is never too old to improve. He has just to stick to his block and peg away. I suppose I work on an average of ten hours a day, but I know artists in Paris who put in fully that time at their easels."

Mr. Cole virtually created the system of engraving from the original, "a great legacy to art." First, he had a photograph of a picture done on wood. Then, with the block, he went to the original and, sitting before it, made the engraving.

"The man who engraves from the original," he said, "is in a position to give the whole life of a picture, using his shadings as, so to speak, color."

Honored With Many Medals

He was awarded the diploma of the Chicago Exposition in 1893, the first class gold medal of the Paris Exposition in 1900, the grand prize and only one given for wood engraving at the St. Louis Exposition in 1904. He held honorary membership in the Society of Sculptors and of the Painters and Engravers of London. He was an honorary member of the Brotherhood of Engravers of Chicago and held the honorary degree of Master of Arts from Princeton. In "Scribner's" he wrote notes on old Italian masters, the Dutch masters and the English masters.

The American Academy of Arts and Letters held an exhibition of Mr. Cole's engravings in January, 1927. Dr. Nicholas Murray Butler presided at a luncheon given in his honor. One of the engraver's last notable works was to make a bookplate for President Coolidge.

His wife, Annie Elizabeth Carter Cole, whom he married in Jersey City Heights in 1875, and three sons, Alphaeus P. Cole, artist, of New York; Lucius Cole and Percy Cole, of Philadelphia, survive.

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